



## Op-Ed: Developing A New Approach To Conventional Arms Control

April 8, 2013 | Dr. Jeffrey D. McCausland

Tagged in: Op-Ed

### Introduction.

Now that President Obama's national security team has been confirmed, the administration can begin to consider its priorities and the policies for the second term. Many might suggest that one of the greatest foreign policy achievements of the President's first term was the negotiation and eventual ratification of the "New START" agreement between the United States and the Russian Federation that dramatically reduced the number of strategic nuclear weapons. In the aftermath of this accord there seems to be ample reason to believe the President wishes to pursue further nuclear reductions over the coming 4 years. The Senate, in its ratification of the New START treaty, urged the administration to seek discussions with Moscow about so-called "nonstrategic nuclear weapons," and it appears the administration is eager to move in that direction. Still, Russian experts have clearly stated that any reduction in Russian nonstrategic forces can occur only if issues surrounding ballistic missile defense and the perceived inferiority of Russian conventional forces with respect to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are addressed. Consequently, the administration will be seeking new ideas on how to jump-start the moribund Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) or other approaches to conventional armed control in order to assuage Russian concerns and in response to expectations in many NATO capitals.

Strategic thinking has been the purview of European diplomats at least since the Congress of Vienna. Metternich, Talleyrand, Bismarck, Czar Alexander, or Castlereagh, would all agree that the

national strategy of any country is built upon three variables. First, what are the “ends” of strategy or the goals each nation is trying to accomplish alone or in concert with friends and allies? Second, what are the “ways” or policies that are formulated in order to move the nation in the direction of a better future? Finally, what are the “means” or resources available to the government of any nation that can be devoted to securing these objectives, and how can they be husbanded in a fashion to maximize their potential?

Consequently, contemporary American and European policymakers would agree that a clear connection exists between arms control and each nation’s respective national security strategy. Arms control is a tool or “way” to accomplish national strategic objectives or “ends.” It is important, therefore, to consider the role of conventional arms control to both maintain and enhance stability in Europe while understanding from the onset that the security environment as well as military technologies continues to develop. As a result, arms control can never be an “end” or objective of policy. Any arms control agreement is neither good nor bad when examined in isolation. Each treaty or agreement only has value as a policy “way” when there are underlying security concerns that, if mitigated, might reduce the possibility of conflict. This is why we do not see arms control agreements being discussed or promulgated between countries that have friendly relations. It is also why we have seen some agreements lapse when security conditions changed.

The emerging security environment demands that we consider conventional arms control in a more holistic fashion. The number of agreements that are the “ways” of conventional arms control is significant. They include the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), the Vienna Document (focused on confidence and security building measures), the Open Skies Agreement (that establishes a regime of unarmed aerial observation flights over the entire territory of the 34 participating states), the conventional arms control agreement associated with the Dayton Accords in the Balkans, and several others. With these in mind, policymakers must avoid focusing too narrowly on particular aspects of any single agreement and rather consider how these agreements work together synergistically to achieve the end of future stability.

Arms control in general has its policy skeptics, and it is often easy to dismiss the success of arms control since we lose sight of its focus. A successful agreement is one that contributes to the prevention of conflict and enhances stability. But it is hard to correlate completely the cause and effect of policies and apply metrics against something that *didn’t* happen. Consequently, it is important to remind ourselves that the level of transparency achieved by agreements like the CFE Treaty or Open Skies is extraordinary when one considers the security situation in Europe 25 years

ago. In many ways these agreements have made the extraordinary routine.

At its very core, any arms control agreement depends upon a harmony of interest among the signatories. This harmony is based on careful analysis by each nation that the security benefits gained by entering the regime outweigh the risks associated with reducing military forces and accepting a transparency regime that includes data exchanges and verification inspections. In this regard, the heads of state who attended the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Astana conference stated that they value the CFE Treaty's contribution to the creation of a stable and predictable environment for all OSCE members. But this may also suggest an essential paradox. The treaty resulted in the destruction of over 72,000 pieces of treaty limited equipment (tanks, artillery, armored troop carriers, attack helicopters, and combat aircraft) and unprecedented levels of verification and transparency. But the magnitude of the agreement that involves 22 signatories simultaneously suggests why a future agreement may be so hard.

In the aftermath of the Russian suspension of the existing CFE Treaty that occurred nearly 6 years ago and the subsequent decision by NATO countries to cease carrying out certain obligations under the treaty with regard to Russia in 2012, the likelihood of finding a new harmony of interest that would allow either a return to the original 1990 agreement or bring the Adapted CFE Treaty (negotiated in 1999) into effect is unlikely. This should not deter efforts to bring the adapted treaty into force, but attempts must also be made to improve other agreements such as the Vienna Document or Open Skies. The administration should also seek to maintain those aspects of the original CFE Treaty that contribute to European stability, as well as the Dayton Arms Control accords which have contributed markedly to peace in the Balkans.

Finally, arms control depends to some degree on other variables. Thucydides noted in his history of the Peloponnesian Wars that a primary motivator of Athenian foreign policy was *"interests."*<sup>[1]</sup> This remains as true in the 21st century as in ancient Greece. Consequently, it is critical to underscore once again that arms control is a "method or way" to achieve the "objective" of improved security. But arms control is not an objective in isolation. Though the focus of any negotiation is the details of the prospective agreement, the arms control process must always remain consistent with the direction of national or alliance security strategy. At its essence, it remains a political activity and cannot be divorced from other aspects of a nation's security or foreign policy. Domestic events, other issues between states, and the bureaucratic process of the participating parties have a direct bearing on how any agreement is negotiated, ratified, and complied with.

## Key Principles and Elements.

With this background in mind, the key principles and constituent elements of modern conventional arms control must begin with a careful understanding of the contemporary security environment. It seems trite to say, but we no longer live in the post-Cold War Era. The period described by this phrase ended at least a decade ago, and the expression itself only portrayed what the world was *not* rather than conveying what it *was*. Europe today is in a period of relative stability, but new challenges are arising. The maintenance of peace and stability in light of ongoing change demands careful consideration of cooperative efforts and of any existing or possible regional conflicts that could, if not addressed over time, disrupt the ongoing environment.

Consequently, the existing environment demands a clear understanding of what is politically possible as well as what is required. Our efforts to negotiate a new “hard conventional arms control agreement” must not become an obstacle to improving other existing agreements such as the Vienna Document and Open Skies. We should not neglect continued efforts to ensure the maintenance of the Dayton Arms Control Agreement and other treaties that further the overall effort to enhance and maintain European security.

These holistic efforts should be guided by certain key principles. First, arms control by its nature is an adversarial relationship. Nations historically have only negotiated agreements with those countries that they believed posed a potential danger to their security. But Europe now exists in an environment that should accentuate **cooperative security** over confrontation. Second, the **indivisibility of security** throughout the European landmass is critically important. OSCE members must continue to insist that the security of any state is as important as the security of any other. Third, **transparency** of military equipment as well as operations will remain critically important and likely be more important than legal limitations on particular weapons systems or platforms.

Finally, arms control has to be **affordable**! Some experts have suggested that recent economic difficulties that have beset many countries will encourage a movement toward more arms control efforts. History does suggest that, in the past, states have sought to use arms control as a “means” to reduce military expenditures. Still, all states will be looking for a “peace dividend” and not a “peace surcharge,” and this should be possible based on the current security environment. The

verification arrangements in the original CFE Treaty were very intrusive, and some would argue were aimed to find the “last tank” in any country. Consequently, many states parties now find this level of verification both unnecessary and expensive. In order to be both economical and encourage cooperative security, any future agreements might consider the establishment of multilateral teams of military officers based in Central Europe and called upon to conduct inspections as required. Membership in these teams could rotate among the member states, and information gained from any inspection would be shared with all signatories.

The geographic limitations of any future agreement obviously must consider the interests of all OSCE members. This would imply an examination of security challenges in the region of the Atlantic to the Urals and beyond. But participating nations may wish to examine those parts of Europe that are not included in existing agreements as well as those regions which suffer from existing or recent conflicts.

All states party to the original CFE Treaty would agree that an essential limitation of the original treaty was that it did not have an “accession clause.” This was due to the fact that the treaty was between “groups of states parties”—NATO and the Warsaw Pact. An accession clause was included in the Adapted CFE Treaty since it was an agreement between individual sovereign states. Obviously, such a clause better reflects an evolving security environment in which NATO expanded and the Warsaw Pact disappeared.

However, the fact that the Adapted CFE Treaty has never entered into force has left us with a geographic anomaly. The Baltic States are now NATO members, but there are no treaty limited ceilings on their respective military forces or the presence of foreign forces on their territory. While the CFE states parties consider the possibility of either how to bring the Adapted Treaty into force or a new negotiation that would supplant the original treaty, Baltic countries might consider an interim step. Declaratory statements concerning their national force levels, presence of foreign forces on their territory, and perhaps even demonstrate a willingness to host additional observations in accordance with the Vienna Document could all be positive actions.

In the negotiations that resulted in the arms control annex to the Dayton Accords the Balkan states crafted the agreement to be a “CFE clone.” They clearly desired to eventually accede to a wider European arms control treaty and hoped over time to join the Adapted CFE Treaty. Obviously, that is unlikely to occur in the near future. Consequently, every effort must be made to maintain this agreement in order to ensure continued stability in the region. Furthermore, the

Balkan states should also participate in any future negotiation for a European-wide conventional arms control treaty.

Finally, the North Caucasus is a region that has experienced significant recent conflict, including war between Russia and Georgia. Azerbaijan and Armenia also still have serious disagreements over Nagorno-Karabakh, and many experts fear this could lead to renewed violence. Consequently, the national limits, verification, and inspections associated with the original CFE Treaty for the nations in this region must be maintained as a prudent safeguard. Furthermore, the members of the OSCE should make every effort to assist and encourage the Minsk Group to seek a final resolution to the disagreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Additional efforts should further be made to encourage improved relations between Russia and Georgia to resolve territorial disagreements. Consequently, a discussion among the North Caucasus states to consider either a sub-regional arms control agreement or additional confidence building measures might be valuable.

## **The Way Forward.**

As we look to the future, the OSCE and its member states should consider new and different approaches to arms control. For example, we have historically examined conventional, nuclear, and chemical/biological weapons in separate forums. This may no longer be possible with respect to nuclear and conventional forces. Over time, the New START agreement will reduce strategic nuclear weapons to a level that will preclude future discussions for the United States and the Russian Federation, absent the inclusion of so-called nonstrategic nuclear forces. As previously suggested, many in the Russian Federation have maintained that these forces are required due to the conventional force imbalance in Europe. Consequently, a future conventional arms control negotiation may need to consider (as we did during the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks) tradeoffs between conventional and tactical nuclear forces.

OSCE countries should also consider how their historic efforts with conventional arms control may be beneficial to expanded stability in other regions around the world. Although it would be a mistake to overstate the similarities between Cold War Europe and today's situation in other regions of the world, there are certainly strong enough parallels to make the European experience very relevant. If one examines the situation between India and Pakistan or the Korean peninsula, they would discover that, like Europe during the Cold War, large numbers of conventional forces are concentrated on each side of a tense border, and very little communication exists between the

two sides about the structure, size, and disposition of their respective forces. Like Europe in the earliest days of conventional arms control discussions in the 1970s, there is no institutionalized forum for exchanging military information or, for that matter, entering into a genuine set of arms control negotiations. Thus, the process that led to various European agreements may provide useful lessons in developing approaches elsewhere. Equally, if not more important, is the extensive menu of measures and agreements that can now be drawn upon for developing specific proposals. The OSCE could play a crucial role as an honest broker in discussions to enhance stability in troubled regions like Korea or South Asia.

OSCE members may also find it useful to consider older mechanisms that were beneficial. For example, prior to the onset of the negotiations for the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), NATO and the Warsaw Pact conducted talks concerning military doctrine. These were designed for both sides to better describe their thinking about contemporary military operations and how new military concepts were being developed as a result of military exercises. Changes in military technology and recent announcements made by major European states indicating that they may begin near-constant military exercises may make future discussions about military doctrine extremely useful.

There is also a dramatic need for cultural and intellectual change. A recent conference on conventional arms control suggests that the community of experts is small and dwindling with fewer and fewer people focusing on this issue.[2] Across the OSCE, younger people are assuming new policy positions in Ministries of Defense and Foreign Ministries, and they have little to no understanding of this policy tool or its history. If a new agreement is to be truly new, then negotiating it will require input from the broader intellectual community as well as replenishment and rejuvenation of its ranks. Future seminars focused on conventional arms control might have enormous value.

Finally, as we consider the way ahead, it may be useful to examine the thoughts of Hans Morgenthau one of the most celebrated scholars of international relations in the 20th century. Morgenthau observed the following three points when considering diplomacy and state policy. First, diplomacy must be rescued from crusading spirits. Second, diplomacy must look at the political scene from the point of view of other nations. Third, the objective of foreign policy must be defined in terms of national interests and supported by adequate power.[3] There can be no doubt that we are bound both for the future and by the future. Consequently, collective efforts must seek to foreordain the circumstances we want to encounter. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,

author of *The Little Prince*, wrote “as for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it.”

## ENDNOTES

1. Charles Robinson, *Greek and Roman Historians*, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc, 1957, p. 71.
2. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Conventional Arms Control and the Euro-Atlantic Security Environment*, Wilton Park, UK, October 12, 2012.
3. Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Thompson, *Politics Among Nations*, 6th Ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985, p. 165.

\*\*\*\*\*

The views expressed in this op-ed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. This opinion piece is cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

\*\*\*\*\*

Organizations interested in reprinting this or other SSI and USAWC Press opinion pieces should contact the Editor for Production via e-mail at *SSI\_Publishing@conus.army.mil*. All organizations granted this right must include the following statement: “Reprinted with permission of the Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, U.S. Army War College.”